

FONSI/EA Cover Letter to Interested Parties

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Environmental Assessment for a Framework Action to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico to Set the 2013 Red Snapper Commercial and Recreational Quotas and Modify the Recreational Bag Limit [RIN: 0648-BC98]

LOCATION: Gulf of Mexico

SUMMARY: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) has submitted the 2013 Red Snapper Framework Action to the subject FMP to NOAA Fisheries for agency review under procedures of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The proposed actions would set the 2013 quotas for commercial and recreational harvest of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. While the Council considered modifying the bag limit for recreational red snapper, they decided to maintain the current 2-fish bag limit. Results from the red snapper update assessment in 2009, and projection updates in 2011 and 2012, indicate the red snapper stock is no longer undergoing overfishing and that the quotas can be increased. Management measures considered in this regulatory amendment would adjust the red snapper acceptable biological catch (ABC) from 8.08 million pounds (mp) whole weight to 8.46 mp whole weight for 2013. The commercial and recreational sector quotas are based on the current 51 percent commercial and 49 percent recreational allocation of red snapper and would become the quotas for the respective sectors. This makes the resulting recreational and commercial quotas consistent with goals and objectives of the Council's red snapper rebuilding plan.

The environmental assessment analyzes the impacts of the proposed actions. By itself, this amendment is not controversial because the quota will be increased. The ABC is sufficiently less than the overfishing limit such that the probability of overfishing is minimal. A determination of the season length will not be finalized until all 2012 recreational landings data are available for analysis.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D., Regional Administrator, Southeast Regional Office, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701, (727) 824-5305, FAX (727) 824-5308.

The environmental review process led us to conclude that these actions will not have a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the environmental assessment, is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the Responsible Official named above.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Montanio
NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure